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ABSTRACT

America's economic future depends on the ability of educators to improve minority student retention and preparation. Demographic trends indicate that the economy will be dependent on the contributions of minority workers, who will comprise 60 percent of the labor force. Yet, school statistics indicate that 70 percent of Hispanic students and 28 percent of Black students drop out of high school, and that those who do graduate are not prepared for higher education. Solutions include the following: (1) improve high school student retention by increasing the quantity and quality of time that students must spend in an enriched, supervised environment supplemented by college student interns; (2) improve the preparation of high school graduates by creating school-college collaboratives specifically designed to increase minority student achievement on standardized tests and to encourage them to elect and persist in academic programs; (3) increase the number of minority students in the top ten percent of their high school class by developing special academic and financial incentives; (4) improve retention of minority college students by hiring minority faculty, monitoring the attitudes of white faculty, and developing a system of financial rewards and punishments for colleges based on their minority graduation rates; and (5) encourage social tolerance of cultural diversity by developing a comprehensive long-range strategic plan on each college campus to ensure a diverse and tolerant environment. A list of 17 references is appended. (FMW)

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THE NATIONAL AGENDA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

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Keynote Address, January 10, 1989
Statewide Conference on
Retention of Minority Students

The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

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I am especially happy to speak to you on this particular occasion because this year, 1989, is an important year. It is the sesquicentennial celebration of Eugenio Maria de Hostos, which will take place this month. Eugenio Maria de Hostos is considered the Teacher of the Americas. He was a leading humanist thinker of 19th century Latin America. He wrote about politics and education, he wrote fiction and philosophy, and he was a leader in the independence movements to free Cuba, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo from Spanish rule. We know that Hostos is a literary giant in Latin America, yet he is relatively unknown among English speaking teachers and students. Hostos was very clear about the future. He knew that the future for Minorities lay wrapped in one important issue -- and that was education. It remains central to our future today -- <u>our</u> future, as Minorities, and our future as Americans.

Many of you are familiar with the noted demographer, Harold Hodgkinson, and you know that he's indicated that there is tremendous change coming in the demographics of this nation. (Hodgkinson, Harold L., 1985)

The seriousness and urgency of this discussion cannot be understated. By the year 2000, one out of every three Americans will be non-white. Within the next five years, 24% of the country's workers in their peak productive years will be Minorities. Dr. Hodgkinson reports that when his parents retired, 10 Americans contributed to their Social Security checks; when he retires, only 5 will be contributing, and of those five, 3 will be Minorities. (1983) In California, by 2010, Minorities will be the majority -- similar trends are apparent in New York, Texas, and New Mexico. (Estrada L., 1988)

Every day in America, at least 40 teenage girls give birth to their <u>third</u> child. More than half of these children are Minority. Twenty-five per cent of all children in U.S. schools

are Minority. By 2000, in over 50 major U.S. cities, the majority of students in public schools will be Minorities. (Hodgkinson, Harold L., 1983)

But approximately 70% of Hispanic students do not finish high school -- 7% don't even begin. (Fernandez, R. 1988) Twenty-eight of every 100 Black high school students drop out. Of the 72 who graduate, only 21 will go on to college. The picture gets

even bleaker. The Black and Hispanic students who stay in high school not only are not prepared for higher education in general, but especially not for study in scientific, professional, or technical fields, and therefore do not or can not pursue careers in these fields. Of the 21 Black students who go to college fewer than 3 complete a Bachelor's degree in <u>any</u> field. (Astin, A. 1982)

All of this is reflected in industry as corporations strive to develop their work force -- to hire qualified employees in spite of the difficulty in finding significant numbers of qualified people, especially qualified Minorities in response to

Affirmative Action requirements. They use special task forces, special advertising campaigns, special training programs, doing what education has failed to do. They are meeting their Corporate Challenge.

The effort to educate our Minority youth is no longer only a question of justice, it is an effort to safeguard the economic health of this country. It is a matter of national security. Our nation's scientists, engineers, and other technical personnel must increasingly be recruited from the non-traditional populations -- women and Minorities. (Hodgkinson, 1983)

It is within this compelling reality that the Academy enters the 21st century. As we do, we are called to meet a host of our own Corporate Challenges -- educational imperatives that must be accomplished if Higher Education is to fulfill its mandate. The responsibility for developing the future generation of leaders and for educating our youth must, of course, be shared by government, the community, and the private sector. But providing the vision and the direction for this work rests with the

Academy. Minorities have the public's attention. My presence here today is indicative of this. It is time to recognize that the paradigm within which we have been operating is no longer adequate. We must break through these limits set by the present model and devise new, creative solutions.

(Challenge 1)

The most critical problems necessarily demand practical, immediate responses. For Minorities, as I have said, the most critical problem is the high school drop out rate, and this is the first Challenge to the Academy. If our objective is to keep students in school, then let us do just that. Keep them in school -- until 6 o'clock instead of 3. Keep them in school 6 days a week instead of 5, 12 months a year instead of 10. And in that extra time, let us provide support, enrichment, and an encouraging and positive atmosphere. Why should Minority children be sent home at 3:00 p.m. too often an empty house to watch T.V. and to supervise themselves. Schools must respond to the problem by keeping children in after-school enrichment

activities and even provide dinner if necessary. Children should go home when someone is there to supervise them. Summers off does not work! Spending an entire summer in an apartment while mothers and fathers work is not in the best interest of these children. Valuable time is wasted. The school year should go all year with short breaks between sessions. Let us break the cycle and develop a generation of children who are at less of a disadvantage. We know which kinds of environments lead to success and which kinds lead to failure. Let us create environments in the schools that lead to success.

In the short term, however, there are avenues to pursue. College students completing community service responsibilities and internship requirements should work in schools with Minority students if possible. They can tutor, they can serve as mentors, and as teachers' and counselors' aids. This model has been proven successful, and has a significant positive effect on the everyday life of elementary and high school students.

(Challenge 2)

While Minorities are most affected by the great number who do not complete high school, the severe underpreparedness of those who do graduate is equally important to higher education. In terms of their achievement later in life, or from another perspective, in terms of meeting the demands of industry for qualified personnel, increasing the academic preparation that students receive prior to college is our next greatest challenge. Too many Minority students do not reach college, or great numbers do not graduate, and they do not graduate in the professional, scientific, or technical fields where the most critical shortages will occur. Here the University must take the lead.

Short term the solutions are limited. Innovative school and college partnerships which provide faculty development as well as student services can cause dramatic changes to take place. Colleges and Universities must get into the Junior and Senior High schools and provide academic support. We all know that in order to receive benefits, as in life, one must be willing to

provide them. One solution is to have undergraduate and graduate students complete graduation or certification requirements by working with Minority students.

In the long term, however, everything is possible. We need Collaborative programs that have significant school and college partnerships, in which children from a very, very early age, for example, are steered strategically toward performing well on standardized tests. We need collaborative programs that strategically steer Minority children to elect academic courses and to stay in them. These differences will lead students to those academic areas from which they are now excluded.

(Challenge 3)

The third Challenge to us is to increase the number of Minority students in the top 10% of their high school class. We are all aware of the wonderful opportunities that exist now for the best and the brightest. We know how even the top universities are competing for those rare few. If we divided these students among the Ivy League schools, we would be lucky if

each campus got but a handful. They are rare, but how can we change that? I say, if your can't find them, then grow your own! Colleges and Universities must get into the Junior and Senior High schools in their own districts. Take cohorts of ninth graders who are identified in Junior High School as having that "Certain Something." Keep them in college preparatory courses, and have a "hand selected" team of talented high school teachers and college professors teach them. Bring them on to your campuses. Let them work in the science laboratories. Have advanced undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty guide them in designing and developing science fair projects. Support them in essay contests as well as in competitions in the creative and performing arts. Offer these students financial aid packages while they are in High School with the stipulation that they must maintain an average of a B or above. This incentive will serve both the student and University well. It isn't

mysterious. We know what works. If you want more students in the top 10% of their graduating class, then you must grow your own.

In preparing my comments for today, I reflected on the issues which I thought would be of most value to you. As I did, it became clearer and clearer that no challenge which I analyzed would be of any value unless one assumption was addressed. To insure that it is, I present the fourth Challenge. This is the assumption that the chief academic officer, in fact, wants to have and to keep people of color on his or her campus. Whether federal laws mandate it, whether Chancellors demand it, whether state laws require it, Minorities on campuses will only be there to complete their degree requirements and graduate if the top administrators of our colleges and universities want this to occur. Real commitment on the part of the leaders of our institutions must be perceived. Faculty, staff, and students are quick to realize when there are simple cosmetic adjustments made

to the student pool or to the faculty ranks. When deliberate and serious attention is conveyed by the chief academic officer, then, and only then, is the Affirmative Action "numbers game" transformed into an "institutional commitment" to people of color.

I am assuming that the chief academic officers here have made that institutional commitment to Minority students, and that it is, therefore, germane to the mission of your institutions to graduate Black and Hispanic students.

One of the most critical areas in Minority student retention is the area of faculty involvement. Every study made on this subject reveals that interaction between faculty and students is one of the most significant factors in preventing attrition. And so this fourth Challenge to the Academy begins with the hiring of Minority faculty who can serve as role models and identify with the Minority student populations. The politics of carefully monitoring departmental searches is delicate, and faculty rights

must be respected. However, Chairpersons must understand that the hiring of qualified Blacks and Hispanics is an important component in the mission of the University. Again, the leadership communicates this commitment as they take action on the hiring, reappointment and promotion of qualified Minority faculty.

But there is another point which is important to stress. The attitude of Majority or White faculty members is an essential factor in retaining and graduating our students. It is easy to establish which faculty members are avoided by Minority students at the colleges and universities. It is not the case that they are the most demanding professors, as you may think. Discussions reveal that it is the faculty member who humiliates Minority students in class, who has little tolerance of anyone who is not prepared the way they were, or who can not be bothered with people who need extra time during office hours. Word goes out quickly and students gravitate to the faculty members who are

sensitive, tolerant and aware of their needs. But how often are these individuals rewarded for this contribution? It is not part of the criteria for reappointment, tenure or promotion. Recognition is given for participation in working with honor students, and this is acknowledged as a worthwhile endeavor. What would happen if this work became important to the decision-makers of our institutions of higher education. What if these faculty members received merit awards or acknowledgement in some significant fashion for "having contributed to the retention and graduation of Minority students?" Perhaps faculty involvement would increase and commitment to this mission would be perceived as being more serious.

When I entered Montclair State College in 1966, I had the opportunity of being in an English Literature class taught by Professor McGee. I was completely intimidated by my classmates, and I was the only Minority in the class. Each class meeting, Professor McGee called the roster for attendance and when he got

to my name, he would say, "Elsa Maria Nunez, what a beautiful name." At first, I was embarrassed and felt uncomfortable; however, as the semester progressed, I began to enjoy the "specialness" he attached to my name. In addition, I met with him during his office hours and rewrote my essays under his tutelage. Dr. McGee was not Black nor was he Hispanic - he was a white man who happened to be a disabled War Veteran. Perhaps his limitations made him sensitive to mine. As I developed my writing skills and grew in self-confidence, I began to speak up in class about my analysis of the literature. I survived my Freshman year because one individual took it upon himself to do everything he could, not to "lower his standards," but to increase his efforts as a teacher. Retention and graduation of our Minority students necessitates just that - an increase in effort by all the top administrators, faculty, and staff, sending the message loud and clear throughout the institution that people of color can succeed there.

It is easy to get caught up in the debate as to where the responsibility of retaining and graduating Black and Hispanic students lies. Does accountability rest with college presidents, Deans of Students, or with the central Departments of Higher Education? Our Minority students can not be the "football" in this debate. As long as tax dollars go to pay the salaries of college presidents and faculty members, then the mission of public institutions must include the retention and graduation of people of color.

Perhaps a reward system should be considered. Those institutions that are producing results, graduating Minority students in numbers which are significant, might receive an increase in their share of funding. Punitive financial measures could be taken in cases in which statistics reflect the lack of proven commitment by colleges and universities.

When the governors make commitments to the advancement of the technologies in higher education, "blue ribbon" committees

are set up, conveying the seriousness and attention our educators and politicians see in this endeavor; no such financial commitment or attention has been attached to the drop in Black and Hispanic enrollment in higher education.

(Challenge 5)

The fifth and final Challenge to the Academy that I will mention today has to do with one of the most fundamental elements of American life that it is our privilege, as well as our duty, to nurture -- that is tolerance to cultural diversity. It is up to the University to foster and safeguard this element of life in America. If we can create on the campuses the kind of enlightened climate we strive for in society, a "kinder, gentler" climate, we will be truly providing leadership. Society will be transformed in ways that are unimaginable.

How do universities and colleges create this kind of campus climate, ensuring a diverse and tolerant community of students, faculty and staff?

The problem is that too often colleges and universities respond to a racial incident or to campus unrest with short term solutions. A committee or task force is set up, a few workshops are developed, some hearings or seminars are organized. And it ends up that as time fades the memory of the incident, so too does the response fade away.

In my opinion, however, comprehensive three-, four- and five-year long-range planning needs to be done. In order to create and maintain a "pluralistic" campus, then serious planning is necessary. A senior University administrator must, in concert with the college community, strategically plan scholarly seminars, symposiums, open hearings on issues related to ethnicity, race and pluralism. Social activities such as International Festivals, awards dinners and luncheons, special orientation programs, and so on are important in order to guarantee that week by week, month by month, and semester by semester, someone in a position of influence is mapping the

University's effort to insure a diverse and tolerant community of students, faculty, and staff. There is a need at every institution of higher education to accommodate the inevitability of increasing cultural diversity on campus and to provide a significant forum for discussion and dialogue, as all our institutions search for effective strategies to achieve these goals. You must be vigilant AND proactive!

In conclusion, we who are here today are people to whom much is given. We are the recipients of an education. We are an able, healthy, successful people. You and I are blessed with privilege, opportunity and intelligence. For ourselves and for our children, the future looks like a promise. Against this ackground of optimism, our age, if it is to deliver on its promise to Minorities in the 21st Century will need people deeply committed to the truth, to what works, to what is real. To face the demands placed on our community, this age demands of us the courage, the dignity, and the integrity to generate behavior

beyond what is merely strategic and personal, beyond what, according to the standards of the opinion makers of the day, is "wise and reasonable."

Our age, if it is to deliver on its promise to Minorities, needs people capable of real heroism -- not the kind of heroism which ends up in glory -- or on the front page of the New York Times -- but the kind which ends up bringing out and making available the truth, what works, what is honest and real.

Our age, if it is to deliver on its promise to Minorities to create a better world, needs people who can reach beyond <u>that</u> which is already determined, <u>that</u> which is already predictable, <u>that</u> which can already be expected, and take the lead in creating new possibilities for the people who can not for whatever reason reach for themselves. And I hope you here today will join me in delivering on its promise to Minorities in the 21st Century.

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